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Occasional Paper Series

Constructivists Online:
Reimagining Progressive Practice

Notes from Special Editors

Helen Freidus, Mollie Welsh Kruger & Steven Goss

Essays by:

Ellen B. Meier

Tamara Spencer

Robin Isserles

Fred Freking & Jenny Ingber

Ramona Cutri, Erin Whiting & Stefinee Pinnegar

Hafdís Guðjónsdóttir, Karen Gísladottir & Svanborg Jonsdottir

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> *Rationalists wearing square hats,*
> *Think, in square rooms,*
> *Looking at the floor,*
> *Looking at the ceiling.*
> *They confine themselves to right-angled triangles.*
> *If they tried rhomboids,*
> *Cones, waving lines ellipses—*
> *As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon—*
> *Rationalists would wear sombreros.*
>   *—Wallace Stevens, Landscape VI from*
>   *"Six Significant Landscapes" (Greene, 1996)*

In 1996, Maxine Greene shared these lines with educators to awaken them to a sense of possibility. She noted that Wallace Stevens does not strike out at rationalists for what they do but uses metaphor to orient readers "to fresh vantage points even in square rooms" (Greene, 1996). Today, digital pedagogy and online education offer new opportunities for possibility, once again calling us out of square rooms.

These new tools and spaces encourage us to "re-vision" our practice, connect with a wider audience of learners, and move away from the traditional confines of the square room. They do not diminish the value of the face-to-face classroom, but they do encourage new habits of mind that make it possible to engage learners of all ages.

In this issue of the Occasional Paper Series, we reimagine progressive pedagogy within the framework of digital pedagogy and online practice. Like Maxine Greene, **Ellen Meier** calls for educators to move beyond the familiar. In her essay, *Beyond a Digital Status Quo: Re-conceptualizing Online Learning Opportunities*, she suggests that new spaces are needed, spaces in which practices will allow teachers to do what they do best, teach to the needs and interests of all students. While the current state of online teaching poses very real challenges, it also provides opportunities for extending and re-conceptualizing practice in exciting and generative ways.

In the first set of essays, **Inside the Online Classroom**, we present the experiences of educators who have entered the square room but have refused to be limited by its constraints. These are teacher educators who have designed their courses for the online venue. Some enthusiastically chose to teach online; others were mandated to do so.

Regardless of how their journey began, each author describes the work she or he is doing to bring constructivist practice online. To the surprise of each of these educators, they find that not only is the work possible, but it leads them to reframe the ways in which they approach their face-to-face teaching:

• **Tamara Spencer**, in *Preparing Teachers as Literacy Leaders in a Hybrid Classroom*, documents the process of taking new literacies and innovative pedagogy online, moving from a face-to-face to a hybrid course, she details the learning of both students and educator.

• **Robin Isserles**, in *Fostering Student Engagement: Creating a "Culture of Learning" Online,* addresses the ways in which distance learning offers possibilities for mitigating inequitable access to higher education — supporting community college students' ability to take ownership of their learning, and encouraging them to think critically about what they are learning.

• In **Fred Freking** & **Jenny Ingber**'s *Teaching Science Teachers in an Online Context with a Constructivist Approach,* the authors discuss the development of an online STEM-based teacher education program, providing a template for the inclusion of constructivist practices, such as course activities and student teaching

• **Ramona Cutri**, **Erin Whiting** & **Stefinee Pinnegar**, in *Activating Students' Emotional and Analytic Engagement with a Blended Learning Format Multicultural Education Course,* activate students' emotional and analytic engagement with multicultural education through online classrooms.

• In *Creating Meaningful Learning Opportunities Online,* **Hafdís Guðjónsdóttir**, **Karen Gísladottir** & **Svanborg Jonsdottir** describe the ways in which they have used digital pedagogy to address the loneliness of the distance learner by making their online course more inclusive and interactive.

In the second set of essays, **Beyond the Online Classroom**, authors describe their experiences in a range of online contexts. These authors came to their work with a vision of how technology might offer new pathways for learning. They ask: what do K-12 classrooms, business school courses, teacher communities of practice, and museum spaces look like when infused with the new opportunities technologies offer?

The authors included in this section use constructivist practices to bring new visions to traditional experiences. They find that the outcomes are even richer than they had anticipated:

• In *Operations Management Outside of the Classroom: An Experiential Approach to Teaching Enabled by Online Learning,* **Kristen Sosulski** & **Harry Chernoff** employ online learning as a way to free their students from the confines of the lecture-based classroom.

• In *Reflection & Technology in Theory and Practice: Teen Engagement in Art Museums*, **Chelsea Kelly** discusses her experience using digital technologies to extend the young museumgoer's voice beyond the walls of the museum and into online communities.

- In *Technology as a Tool for Collaboration, Understanding & Engagement*, **Kai Johnson** incorporates multimodal online inquiry to deepen the thinking of children in his elementary classroom. When he sees how engaged his students are in their work, he realizes that this is a true picture of constructivist learning.

- **Marvin Cohen**, **Babette Moeller** & **Michelle Cerrone** document the ways in which online communities of practice enable teachers to have meaningful conversations sharing practices and discussing the nuances of teaching math in *Constructing Online Communities of Practice*.

Across these articles, we find educators engaging with the challenges they encountered and emerging with new visions of constructivist practice. Authors who began as skeptics discovered possibilities. Authors who thought they understood the potential of online practice were struck by their students' and their own increased insight. The energy in these articles is palpable.

As you read about the journeys these educators took into rooms of different shapes, spaces, and sizes, we encourage you to look with new eyes and attend with open minds. Our hope is that the ideas presented in this edition of the Occasional Paper Series will encourage you to experiment with and document your own forays into online practice. We need more examples of teachers who have journeyed online to create constructivist classrooms and are willing to come back and share what they have discovered.

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Mollie Welsh Kruger is on the graduate faculty at Bank Street College of Education where she is an advisor and instructor in the Reading and Literacy Program. As a member of ORG (The Online Research Group), Mollie has extended her thinking about online teaching which she continues to explore from earlier graduate school entries to blended opportunities at Bank Street. Before joining the Bank Street faculty, Mollie taught in New York City elementary schools for more than 20 years. She is cochair of the Bank Street College Children's Book Committee and provides professional development support to NYC Public School teachers and schools.

Steven Goss is vice provost of digital learning at Teachers College, Columbia University. He joined

Teachers College after serving as the director of online education at Bank Street College, where he helped to facilitate the institutional mission for online education. Prior to working at Bank Street, he led several online initiatives at New York University, including The Center for Faculty Innovations in Teaching and Learning at NYU-Poly, a center he designed and directed. He has taught diverse student audiences, including K–12, undergraduate, and graduate. He teaches courses closely related to his academic interests, including instructional design, project development, and user experience.